

Take yourself back about seventy-five years, and you're driving through the Salt Creek Oil Field, the biggest and richest oil reserve in the Rocky Mountain region and one of the five or six largest in the entire country. Over 3000 oil derricks dominate the landscape. Midwest Wildcats are about to play the first night High School football game in the country under lights. Although the Salt Creek Oil Field was linked to Casper by highway, rail, and pipeline, residents of the company town and camps were quite self-sufficient. Workers and their families lived in small cottages provided by the company, and the town of Midwest offered all the amenities of any small town. Millions of dollars worth of oil were pumped out of the Salt Creek Field, and thousands of people, from the 1880s to the present, have lived and worked at Salt Creek. The field is still active today.

This self-guided tour is most easily followed from south to north, beginning at the junction of Interstate 25 and State Route 259, located about twenty-two miles north of Casper. The tour terminates at the town of Midwest. the following sites are included in the tour of the Salt Creek Oil Field area, listed roughly from south to north:



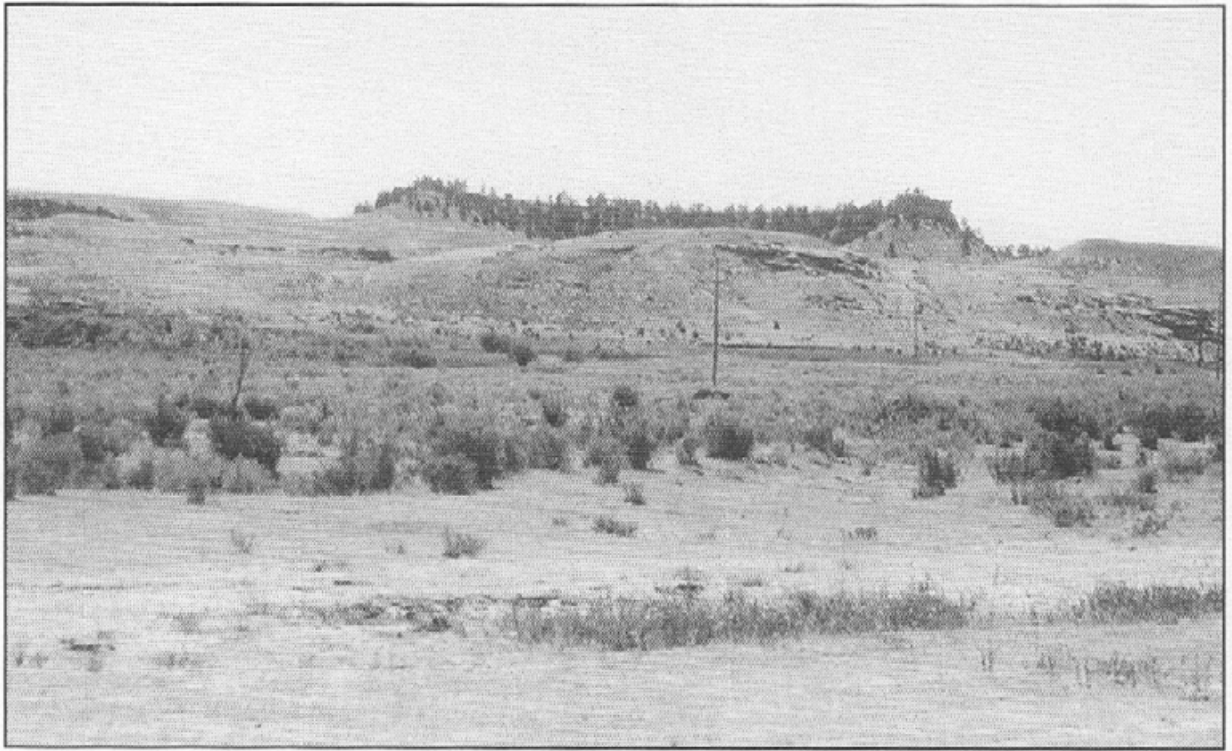


*Historic photo of Teapot Rock, undated; formation retains its spout but not the handle when this photo was taken (Photo courtesy of Wyoming State Archives)*

### **Stop 1: A Symbol of Scandal: Teapot Rock**

How to find it: About 4.5 miles north of the junction of I-25 and State Route 259, a unique geologic structure known as Teapot Rock dominates the landscape just east of the highway. Teapot Ranch is nestled at its base (E-1/2 Section 27, T38N-R79W)

About the site: This landmark was so distinctive with its handle and spout that the nearby Teapot dome Oil Field was named after it. Unfortunately, the rock has lost both its characteristic spout and handle over the years to the elements. The handle was the first to go; Pauline Schultz, curator of the Salt Creek Museum in Midwest, says that the spout was destroyed during a tornado sometime after this historic photograph was taken. At this point, the great oil-bearing sands of the Teapot Dome and the Salt Creek field are several miles to the north.



*Teapot townsite today; the formation known as “the amphitheater” in background*

### **Stop 2: Not A Trace: Teapot Townsite**

How to find it: Continue north on State Route 259 for about six miles (ten miles from the junction of I-25 and 259) and look for a gravel road with gate leaving the highway and trending southeast. Just south of the gravel road and along the east side of the highway was the townsite of Teapot. The site is located on private land but can be viewed from the junction of the highway and the gravel road. (NE/SW Section 31, T39N-R78W)

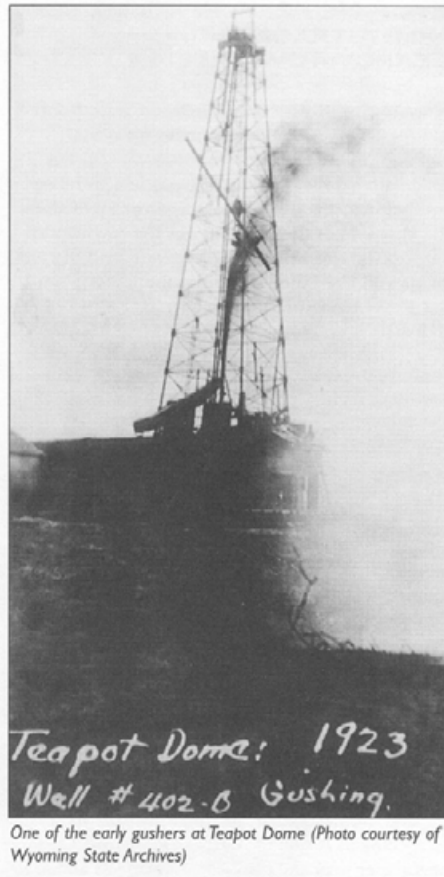
About the site: Teapot was established in 1922 along the old Casper-Salt Creek Highway as a residential and commercial area for workers in the Teapot Dome fields. It was located on a parcel of land homesteaded by John Beaton in 1912. According to Alfred Mokler, early Natrona County newspaper man and historian, Teapot was added to the map of Natrona County on August 11, 1922, when more than 1000 town lots, which had been surveyed and platted as a townsite along the Casper-Salt Creek highway, were put on the market by the Teapot Development Company. The townsite consisted of the 160 acres comprising John Beaton's homestead "...and is one of the very few pieces of land inside of the Teapot Oil structure upon which a patent has been issued with no royalty restrictions."



*The old swimming pool is still visible from the highway  
(in photo just below cattle)*

### **Stop 3: New Lavoye: The Palm Beach of Wyoming**

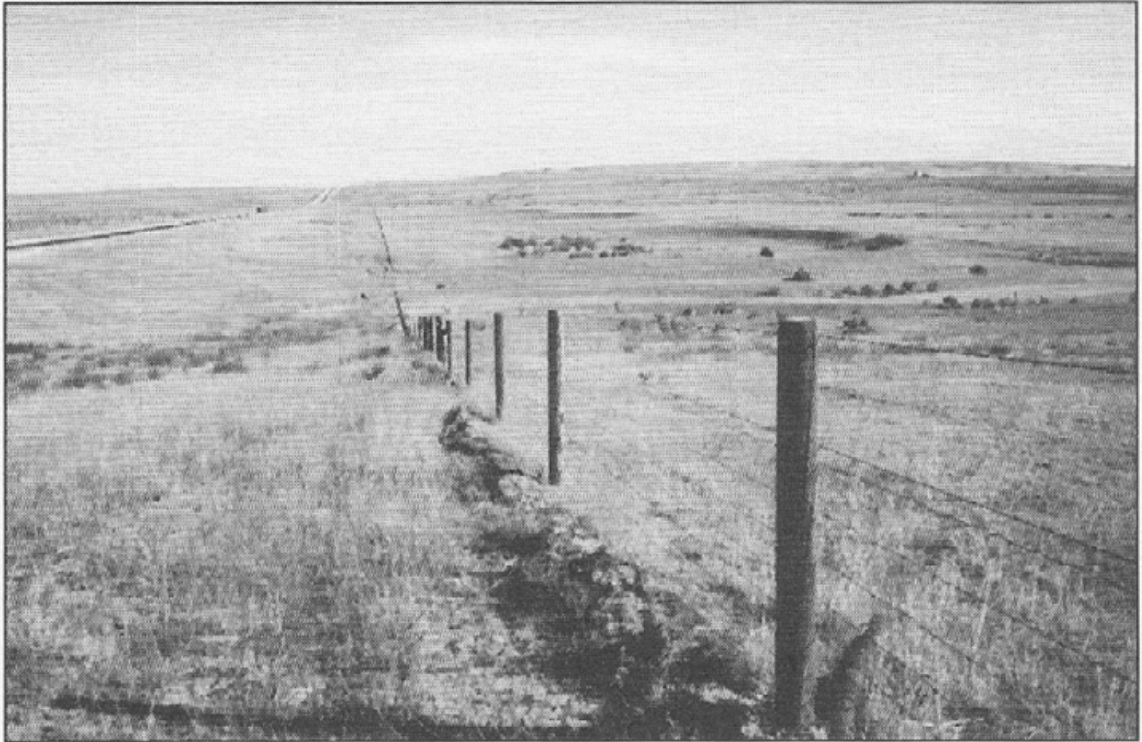
How to find it: Continue north about one mile from the Teapot townsite. Just south of the turnoff to the Naval Reserve (Teapot Dome) and along a curve of the highway is the site of another vanished oil town, New Lavoye. The site is located on private property but can be seen from the highway. The only clue to its location is the unexpected sight of an empty swimming pool on the east side of the highway. (SE/SE Section 30, SW/SW Section 29, T39N-R78W) About the site: New Lavoye consisted of many buildings that were moved from old Lavoye (Site No.6), when those residents were evicted by the Ohio Oil Company.. Like Teapot, it was also located along the old Casper-Salt Creek Highway. Many of the Old Lavoye residents simply jacked up their houses, put wheels under them, and moved them to New Lavoye, where they laid out the streets and positioned the houses to imitate the old town. A post office was established at New Lavoye on April 1, 1924, and was discontinued on September 7, 1929. Although it was short-lived town, New Lavoye had a mineral water swimming pool, stores, theater, and dance hall. At first drinking water was hauled in by tank trucks from Casper. By the early 1930s the town had passed its prime, but photographs from that time still show many standing buildings. The buildings were eventually moved to Edgerton and Salt Creek to make room for more drilling.



#### **Stop 4: Teapot Dome (Naval Petroleum Reserve): Watergate of the 1920s**

How to find it: Just north of the New Lavoye townsite and about eleven miles from the junction of I-25 and Route 259, a signed blacktop road diverges from the highway and heads east-northeast to Teapot Dome. About one-tenth of a mile down this road, good remnants of the old Salt Creek highway are visible to the north. Continue northeast then southeast along the signed roads to the oil field. Headquarters are located about four miles from the highway, and visitors are permitted to ride through the field on the main roads. However, off-road exploration requires visitors to sign in at the Safety and Environmental Offices. (Teapot Dome is located roughly in the south half of T39N-R78W and the north half of T38N-R78W.)

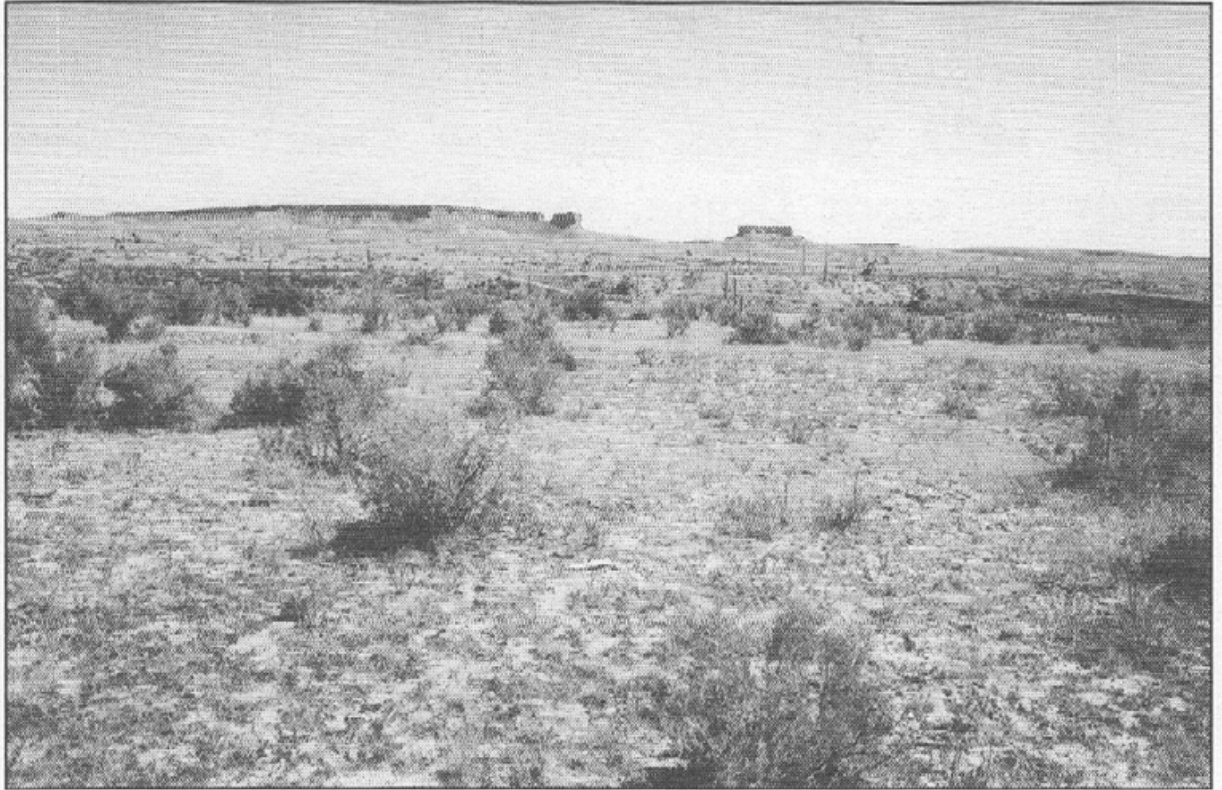
About the site: This oil reserve, originally known as Irish Park, was set aside by President Wilson in 1915 for the Navy, which was in the process of converting the power for its ships from coal to oil. Teapot Dome became the subject of a nationwide scandal when President Harding's Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, was forced to resign for accepting bribes from oilmen Edward Doheny and Harry Sinclair when he leased the federal reserves. The story broke in April 1922, with Denver Post headlines proclaiming "Teapot Dome leases to Sinclair threatens Wyoming oil scandal." in August, the Marines were called in to peacefully settle a dispute among the Mutual Oil Company, the Department of the Interior, and Harry Sinclair.



*East of the fenceline are the four shallow earthen berms indicating the former site of the storage tanks.*

### **Stop 5: Pumping Station/Storage Tank Facility**

How to find it: From Teapot Dome, return to State Route 259. Stop at a high point a short distance north of the Teapot Dome road and look north along the east side of the highway right-of-way fence. Faintly visible are four large but shallow circular earthen berms, measuring almost 300 feet in diameter. (NE/NE, SE/NE Section 30, T39N-R78W) About the site: These berms mark the former location of four large oil storage tanks that were part of a pumping station located along an oil pipeline constructed from Salt Creek to Casper in 1924-1925. the earthen berms were used to contain the oil in the event of a leak or fire.

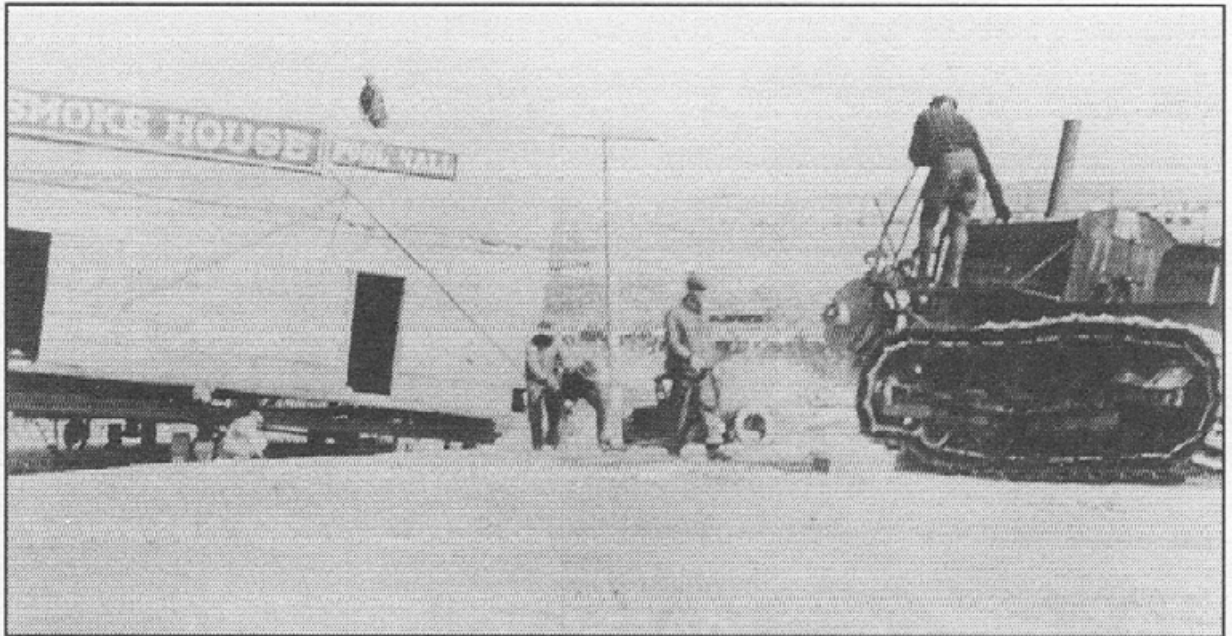


*Site of Old Lavoye; Castle Rock prominent in the background*



*The main street of Old Lavoye, ca. early 1920s (Photo courtesy of Wyoming State Archives)*

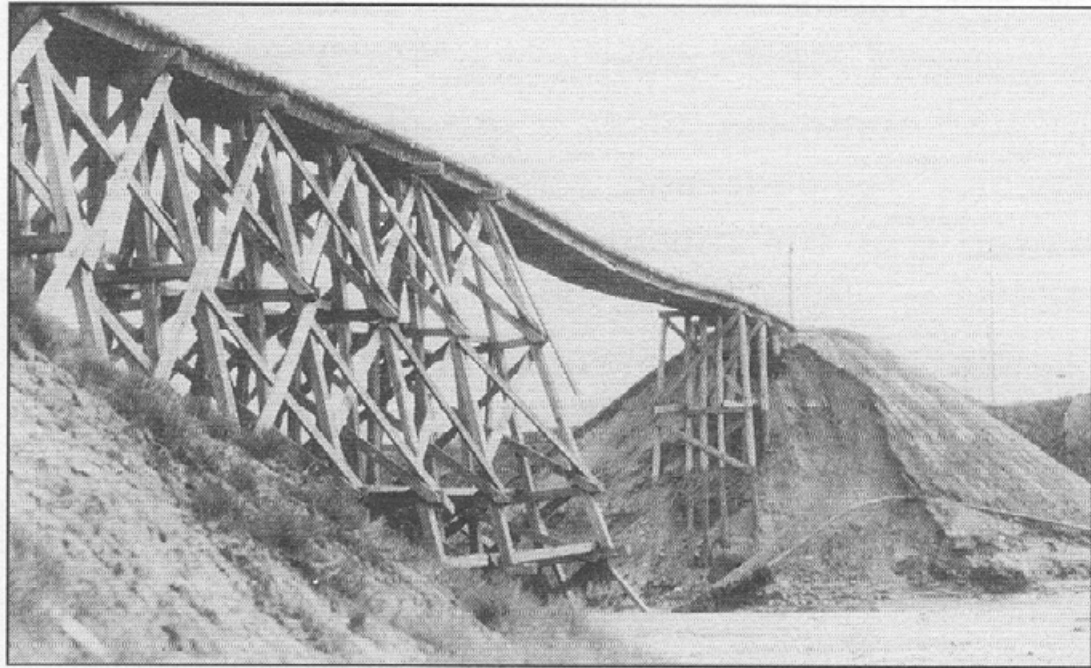




*Moving the pool hall from Old Lavoye in 1924, when the townspeople were ordered to leave. Most of the buildings ended up in New Lavoye or other camps.*

#### **Stop 6: Old Lavoye: Picked Up and Moved**

How to find it: drive west through Midwest and turn south along the road that borders the west side of town. Continue south, passing Gas Plant Camp (Stop No. 8). About 2.2 miles south of Midwest, the road forks; just south of this junction and between the two roads is the location of Old Lavoye. There are no physical remnants other than some scattered broken glass and ceramics at this historic site. (NE/SW Section 1, T39N-R79W) About the site: Also known as Mosher Camp, Lavoye is one of the more famous ghost towns in the Salt Creek Oil Field. Louis Lavoye, A French Canadian, filed on a homestead at this location; with some others, he decided to develop a townsite at the height of the Salt Creek oil boom. By the fall of 1923, an estimated 1000 people (one source stated 3000) were living in and around this town. A post office operated at Lavoye for about one year, from January 1923 to January 1924. On the evening of December 23, 1923, a fire swept through a portion of the business district on the east side of Main Street, destroying the Triangle garage, the Bank of Salt Creek, a drug store, a furniture store, a jewelry store, and a meat market, as well as a two-story building owned by the Mednick Brothers Clothing Store.



*The flood of July 1926 destroyed the railroad trestle at Midwest (Photo courtesy of American Heritage Center, U. of Wyoming)*

### **Stop 7: The North-South Railroad: Remnants of a Grand Scheme**

How to find it: this abandoned railroad grade can be traced for several miles through the Salt Creek Oil Field, with varying degrees of physical integrity, but is most evident where there were prominent cuts and fills. There is one such fill with a washed-out short trestle just west of the road a short distance north of Old Lavoye, and the grade is also easily viewed in this area. (NE/SW Section 1, T39N-R79W)

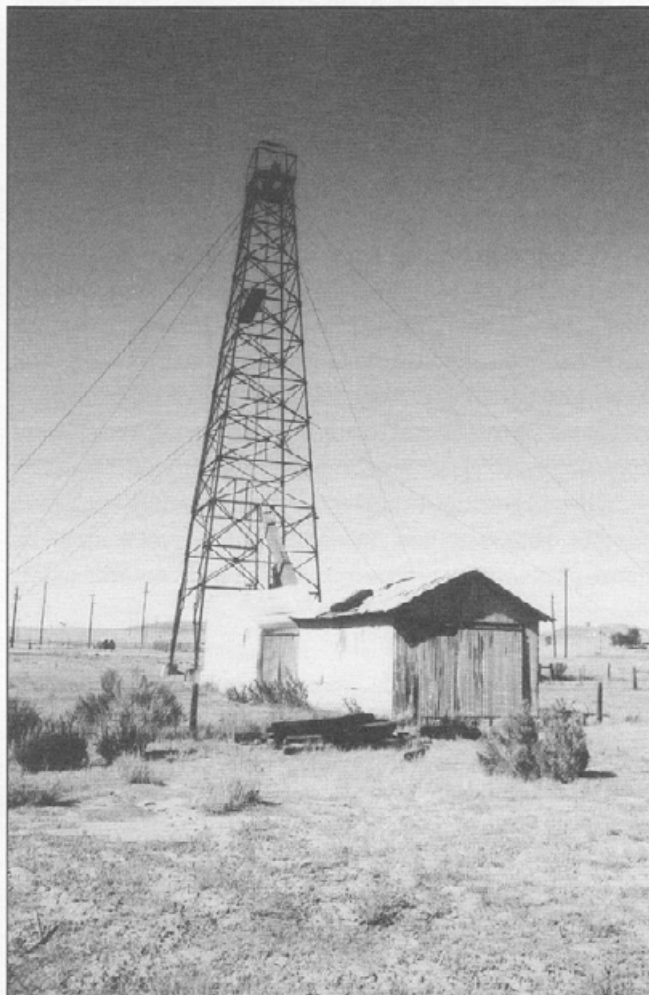
About the site: This forty-mile long railroad branch was constructed to Midwest in 1923. The North-South Railroad was a grand building scheme to link the major east-west rail lines. It was to run from Miles City, Montana, to Steamboat Springs, Colorado, but most of the line never evolved past the planning phase. However, in 1923, construction began on the branch line, starting on the south at the mainline of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad west of Casper. Tracks were laid north, and the first passenger train arrived at the new town of Salt Creek in mid-September 1923. (Note: When the post office at this point was named Salt Creek, the town of Salt Creek five miles to the northwest was renamed Midwest, which was also served by the railroad.) Numerous sidings and loading points were later added along the right-of-way throughout the Salt Creek Field. The railroad arrived just at the height of the oil boom, helping to transport the massive amount of materials needed to build and equip the electric generating plant for the field (Stop 16 on the tour). The boom soon stabilized, but then quickly declined as the nation entered the Great Depression. The remainder of the North-South Railroad was never completed, and it was destined to stay only a branch line to the Salt Creek Oil Field. The railroad went into receivership in 1935, and service ceased a short time later. The line was abandoned and the trackage was salvaged. The short-lived railroad era at Salt Creek lasted only twelve years.



*Looking north along the abandoned railroad grade south of Midwest*

**Stop 8: Gas Plant Camp, Midwest's Major Suburb**

How to find it: Retrace your route north; Gas Plant Camp is located about halfway between Old Lavoye and present-day Midwest on the east side of the road. (N-1/2 Section 36, T40N-R79W) About the site: Gas Plant Camp was the largest camp after Midwest in the Salt Creek Oil Field, built to house the workers who operated the main gas plant (located between the Camp and Midwest). Many original residences are still occupied. Although several have been remodeled and some trailers moved in, Gas Plant Camp still gives the public a good idea of how the camps looked during the height of the oil boom in Salt Creek.



*At one time, there were over 3000 oil derricks in the Salt Creek Field. This derrick remains standing at the highway junction just east of Midwest.*

### **Stop 9: Salt Creek Oil Field Interpretive Sign and Oil Derrick**

How to find it: Junction of State Route 259 and 387 just east of Midwest; the sign is on the west side of the intersection, and the oil derrick is on the east side.

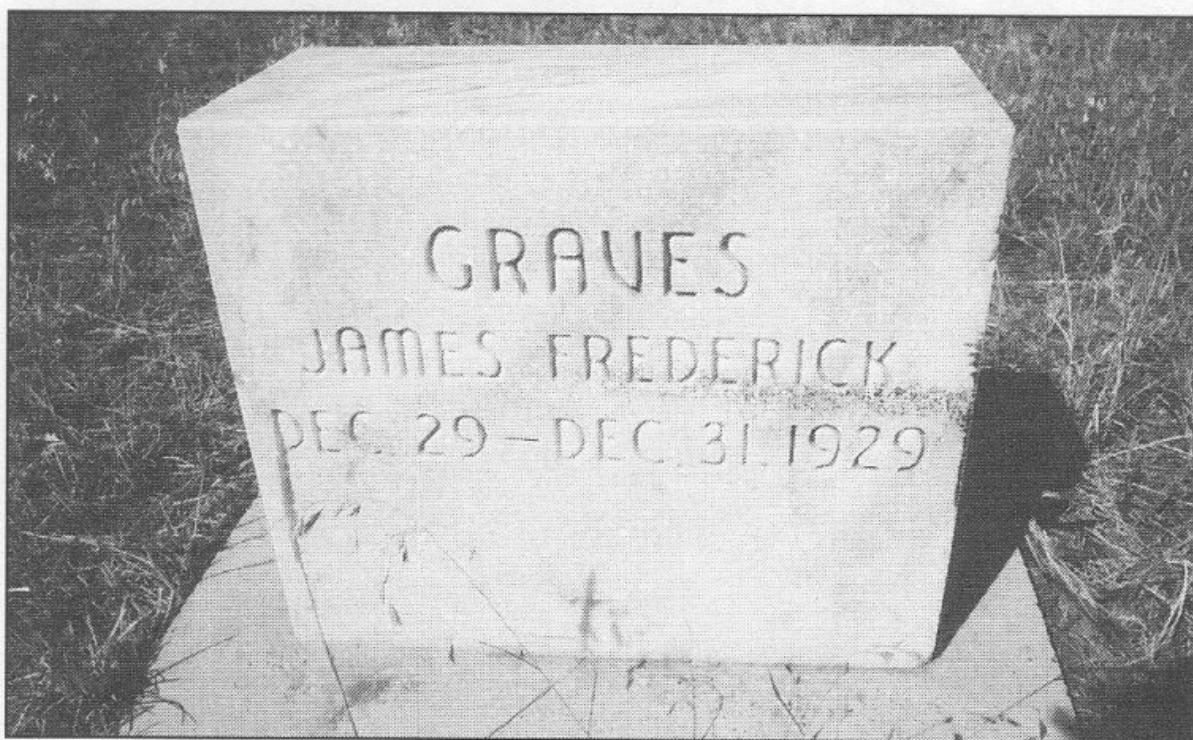
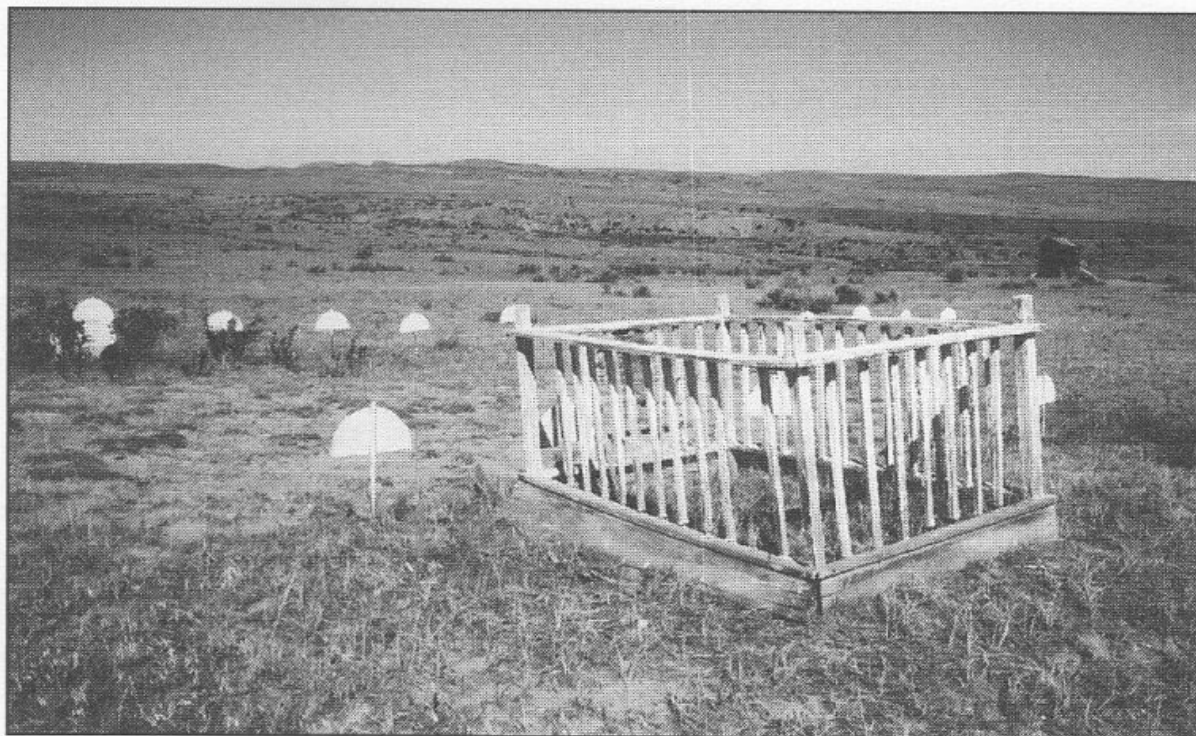
About the site: An interpretive sign and a nearby derrick explain the history of the Salt Creek Oil Field. A pull-off is located in front of the sign on the west side of the road.



**Stop 10: Canadian Camp**

How to find it: From the highway junction at Midwest, follow Route 387 west toward I-25 for about 1.5 miles. Cross Salt Creek on a modern highway bridge, continue about .2 mile, then turn south on oil field road. Follow road that leads west then southwest for about .5 mile; the site is found by locating a few isolated hand-planted cottonwood trees. The immediate area has been intensively exploited for oil, and there are dozens of operating and abandoned wells visible from and within the site. (NE/SW Section 23, T40N-R79W)

About the site: Canadian Camp, also known as Camp No. 4, does not appear on historic maps until 1920, when it consisted of one row of seven buildings, probably the tarpaper shacks built by a small group of Canadians that were standing when the Midwest Company established its camp here in 1921. the company built six 3-room cottages, a large boardinghouse, a boiler house and an office, and the older buildings were moved to a nearby auxiliary camp. Initially called Camp No. 3, Midwest was renamed Camp No. 4 and was the headquarters of District No. 4. Canadian Camp was one of the larger outlying camps, and during its peak in the 1920s, had a population of 700 to 800.



*Many of the graves at the Midwest Cemetery are those of infants. The small metal markers were provided by the Midwest Oil Company.*

### **Stop 11: Midwest Cemetery**

**How to find it:** The Midwest Cemetery is somewhat isolated from the main oil field. From Canadian Camp, return to the highway; turn west (left) and proceed about 1.1 mile; turn south on oil field road. Continue south about .5 mile; there is a small building labeled "A9" on the east side of the road. Bear southwest then west about 1.1 mile to the cemetery. (NW/SE Section 21, T40N-R79W)

**About the site:** The cemetery retains numerous graves, most of which date from 1926-1936. The graves are marked with unique metal markers provided by the oil company. A few of the individual graves are set off from the others by small fenced plots. Many of the markers indicate the high infant mortality rate of earlier days. The cemetery was closed in about 1936, and most people were then buried in Casper.

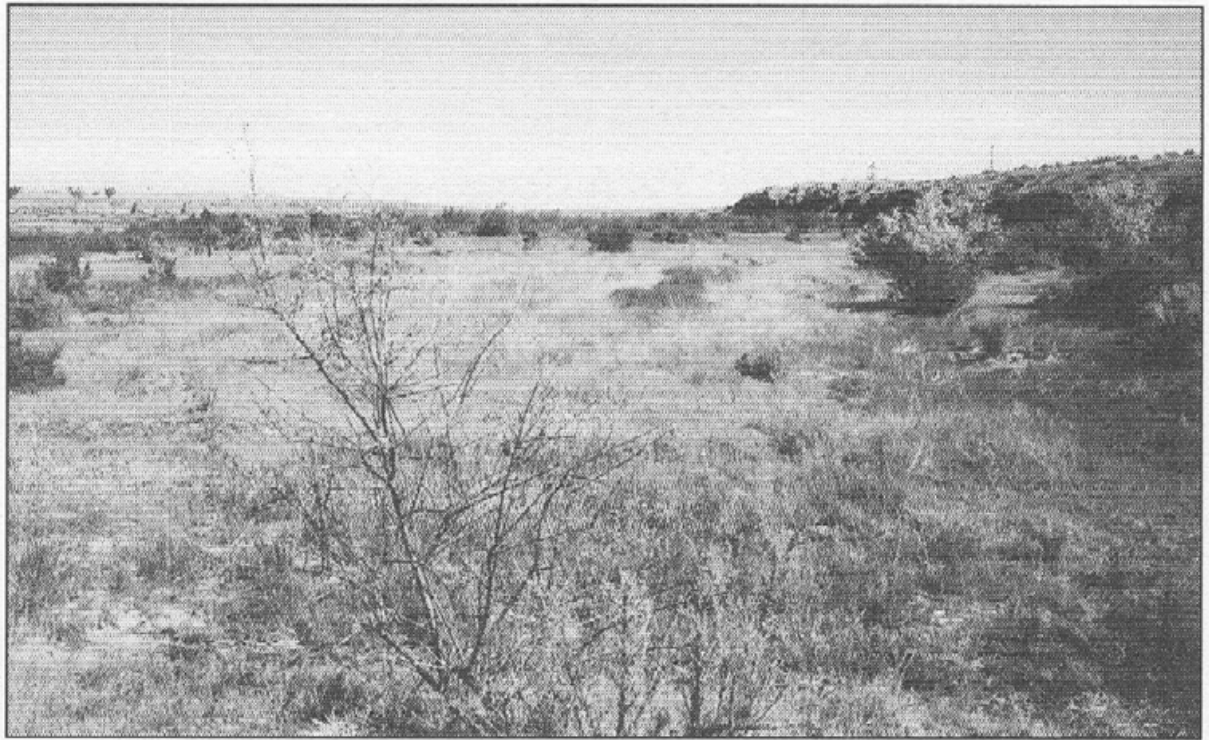


*Streets, sidewalks, and hand-planted trees at Lewis Camp*

### **Stop 12: Lewis Camp (Camp No. 3)**

**How to find it:** Return to the highway (State Route 387) and turn east toward Midwest. Turn north onto the oil field road located about .1 mile west of the Salt Creek bridge. Proceed north about .6 mile; at a junction bear right; Lewis Camp is about .1 mile to the northeast, located on a gentle slope with several hand-planted trees. (SW/NW Section 13, T40N-R79W)

**About the site:** Lewis Camp once contained four rows of twenty-five houses with landscaped trees and hedges, some of which still mark this site. Although all of the oil camps were dismantled, this remains one of the better preserved with 54 building depressions/foundation. Two north-south streets and three east-west streets can still be seen. The relative importance of Lewis Camp can be inferred from its concrete sidewalks, a sewer system with man-hole covers and cisterns, and plumbing and natural gas systems.



*Iba Spring on the east side of Salt Creek was the location of the first discoveries in the oil field*

### **Stop 13: Jackass (IBA) Spring**

**How to find it:** This site represents one of the first oil seeps discovered in the Salt Creek Oil Field. It was located along the east bank of Salt Creek, and although the seep no longer exists, its approximate location can be identified along the bluffs on the east side of Salt Creek and can be viewed from the highway bridge that crosses Salt Creek on State Route 387 north of Midwest. (SE/SW Section 13, T40N-R79W) **About the site:** This oil seep was brought to the white man's attention by a Native American who brought oil to Fort Fetterman to be used as an ointment for treating horses. The seeps suggested the presence of larger oil reserves at Salt Creek. This discovery, known as Jackass Spring, was covered by the first location notice field in the Salt Creek Field. It was also known as Iba Spring, after Cy Iba one of the early developers of the field (see "Pioneers of the Field").





*An old pipeline and footbridge cross Salt Creek in the vicinity of the Shannon Oil Field*

#### **Stop 14: The First Well: Shannon Pool Oil Field; Shannon Camp**

How to find it: Turn north onto Power Plant Road (County Road 116) just north of Midwest. Continue north about four miles, then bear west (left) at a junction.

Approximately 1.2 miles brings you to a good overlook on the bluff above Salt Creek, and one of several informal two-tracks can be taken down onto the flood plain. There are no remnants of Shannon Camp, but the overall area looks much the same as in historic photos. There is an old footbridge associated with a pipeline across Salt Creek near this location. (NW-1/4 Section 1, T40N-R79W)

About the site: The first well in the Salt Creek region was drilled with cable tools in what became the Shannon Field, about four miles north of the heart of the Salt Creek Field. Shannon Well No. 1 was drilled by P.M. Shannon of the Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Company in 1889. The hole was drilled to a depth of 1,030 feet and successfully struck oil. The rigs used at this time were described as of the Pennsylvania type, using a rope rig; the rigs were usually moved from one well to another to save money.



*Midwest Electric Plant*

**Stop 15: A Monument To Engineering: The Midwest Electric Plant**

How to find it: Return to Power Plant Road (County Road 116) and continue northwest about one mile; the power plant is a massive structure that can be viewed from a wire gate across the road. This gate is 4.3 miles from the main highway at Midwest. According to Pauline Schultz, curator of the Salt Creek Museum, the public can continue past the gate to get a closer view of the plant. (NE-1/4 Section 36, T41N-R79W) About the site: This large concrete and steel power plant was constructed in 1923-1924, the height of the oil boom. In conjunction with a large dam, it supplied electricity for the Salt Creek Field and various camps.



Early photo of the commercial section of Salt Creek (renamed Midwest in about 1924) (Photo courtesy of the American Heritage Center, U. of Wyoming)

### **Stop 16: Midwest: Where "Democracy and Fairness Predominates"**

How to find it: The town of Midwest (also formerly known as Camp No. 1, Home Camp, and Salt Creek) is located on the west side of the intersection of State Routes 259 and 387. (NE 1/4 Section 25, T40N-R79W)

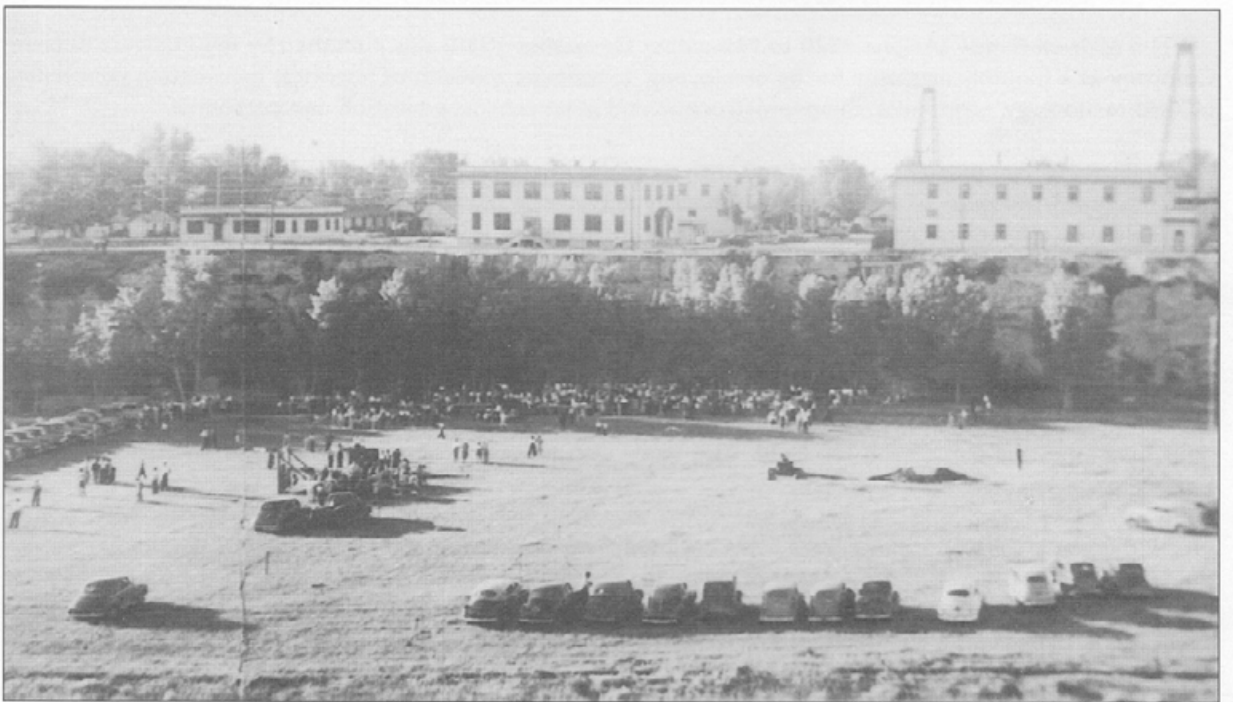
About the site: The basic history of Midwest is discussed on pages 11-13 of our tour guide. Today, Midwest retains many original company cottages that still convey their historical appearance, although some have been remodeled or re-sided. Most of the old commercial district, including the Salt Creek Hotel, boardinghouse, and recreation center/library, have been razed except for the two-story, wood frame community hall at the southeast end of town. The old school buildings have been razed, but the wood frame teacherage remains as a private residence the old stucco hospital, later used for company offices, still stands and is now used as the town hall.



*In the early days of Salt Creek, some people still lived in "tent homes." These were the quarters of Malcolm and Rita Campbell, and Donald and Nelle Campbell, 1914. (Photo courtesy of the American Heritage Center, U. of Wyoming)*



*Today, about the only remaining commercial building from Midwest's boom days is the Community Hall.*



*Historic photo of Midwest, showing the commercial district on the edge of a bluff and a field for community activities below. (No date, Photo courtesy of Wyoming State Archives)*